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ABSTRACT

Following a brief discussion of the works of the philosopher Jacques Maritain, who viewed the educational process as the art of helping individuals to realize the nature of that which is inherent in them, this paper analyzes the implications of Maritain's views for the discipline of speech communication. The paper suggests that education in speech communication must emerge from a consideration of what the individual is in his or her fundamental nature and must stimulate and direct the individual's natural and inevitable powers of the spoken word so that these powers are developed and perfected. The paper also explores five concerns for members of the discipline: (1) a disregard for the primary end of education, (2) false or ill-defined ideas concerning that end, (3) an overemphasis on the pragmatic aspects of education, (4) an overemphasis on social development and a lack of emphasis on the acquisition of personal autonomy, and (5) an overemphasis on precision and technical specialization. (Author/FL)

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TITLE: The Primary Aim of Speech Communication Education: Some Potential Concerns for Members of the Discipline*

ABSTRACT:

This paper explores the work of philosopher Jacques Maritain, who set forth the proposition that "the chief task of education is above all to shape man." The educational process is viewed by Maritain as the art of helping individuals to realize the nature of that which is inherent in them. The implications of Maritain's position for the discipline of speech communication are explored by suggesting that education in speech communication must, first of all, emerge from a consideration of what the individual is in his or her fundamental nature. Speech communication education, therefore, is viewed as the art of stimulating and directing the individual's natural and inevitable powers of the spoken word so that these powers are developed and perfected to their fullest potential. This paper also explores what are thought to be five potential concerns for members of the discipline. These concerns include (1) a disregard for the primary end of education, (2) false or ill-defined ideas concerning this end, (3) an overemphasis on the pragmatic aspects of education, (4) an overemphasis on social development and a lack of emphasis on the acquisition of personal antonomy, and (5) an overemphasis on precision and technical specialization.

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The Primary Aim of Speech Communication Education:

Some Potential Concerns for Members of the Discipline

> Man is not merely an animal of nature, like a skylark or a bear. He is also an animal of culture, whose race can subsist only within the development of society and civilization, he is a historical animal: hence the multiplicity of cultural or ethico-historical patterns into which man is diversified; hence, too, the essential importance of education.[1]

In one of his most famous essays on education, Education at the Crossroads, philosopher Jacques Maritain set forth the proposition that "the chief task of education is above all to shape man, or to guide the evolving dynamism through which man forms himself as a man."[2] He also observed that nothing is more important for each of us, or more difficult, than to become fully human. The educational process, therefore, is viewed by Maritain as the art of helping individuals to realize the nature of that which is inherent in them. Furthermore, what education must be will depend almost entirely on what it means to be human. Thus, as Maritain suggested, in order to know what education must consist of, we must first of all focus our attention on the nature of human existence. Once it is known what it means to be human, then we will know the ultimate end toward which education should direct itself. Only when this understanding has been attained, notes Maritain, will educators be in a position to know what means they must employ to realize this end.[3]

If we accept Maritain's position as valid, then it follows that the primary aim of speech communication is universal. To the extent that a child suffers no serious decrement (congenitally or through trauma) to the physiological, neurological, or psychological factors associated with the acquisition of spoken language, then the potential for speech communication is a universal one.[4] This potential does not change with time, or culture,

or circumstance, but is instead present in all normal and healthy human beings. If there is an innate component in the acquisition of spoken language as Lenneberg[5] and Chomsky[6] have suggested, and human beings are biologically endowed with competencies that predispose them to the use of speech as their primary communication system, then there is reason to believe that the proper aim of speech communication education must be to actualize the individual's potential nature. Furthermore, since all humans share the same potential nature, the aim of speech communication education must always be the same. It is in this sense that the aim of education is absolute and universal. Consider, for example, the following quote by Robert Hutchins, who writes:

> Every man has a function as a man. The function of a citizen or a subject may vary from society to society, and the system of training, or adaptation, or instruction, or meeting immediate needs may vary with it. But the function of man as man is the same in every age and every society, since it results from his nature as a man. The aim of an educational system is the same in every age and in every society where such a system can exist; it is to improve man as man.[7]

Or, as Mortimer Adler expressed it,

> If a man is a rational animal, constant in nature throughout history, then there must be certain constant features in every sound educational program, regardless of culture or epoch.[8]

According to these scholars, what constitutes the proper aim of education is not entirely a matter of opinion or personal preference. Instead, they have insisted that the primary aim of education can be logically demonstrated. For our purposes, this can be accomplished through an understanding that the ultimate aim of speech communication education is the same for all individuals in all times and under all circumstances. In addition, it must be established that the aim of speech communication education, being derived from the nature of what it means to be human, is always the same

because speech communication is always and everywhere the same. Quite obviously, it is of importance to this argument to be able to demonstrate that human communication is constant and unchanging. This demonstration can be accomplished through an examination of the functions of speech communication as universals.

The Powers of Speech Communication

The word function, as used by Dance and Larson, is thought to describe "a relationship wherein one quality is so related to another quality that it is dependent on and varies with it.[9] Dance and Larson distinguish function from purpose on the basis of the presence or absence of intent. Because function is the natural and inevitable result of something it does not imply a need for intention. Purpose, on the other hand, is the result of a conscious or unconscious decision to do something with something. It is a matter of choice or option, and it always requires the presence of intent.

Speech communication, according to Dance and Larson, has three functions: (1) the linking of the individual with his or her environment, (2) the development of higher mental processes, and (3) the regulation of behavior. Dance and Larson note that these functions are independent of volition in their origin, but can purposefully be developed and perfected by conscious intention through the educational process. Furthermore, these functions occur as a natural and inevitable result of the occurrence of speech communication in the individual. If speech communication is present, then the functions of speech communication, in some interwoven combination, are also present. It is in this sense that speech communication is always and everywhere the same, and that the functions of speech communication can best be

described as universals.

With this in mind, the meaning of Maritain's statement that the ultimate aim of education is "to shape man" becomes ever more apparent. One of the implications of this statement is that an education in speech communication must, first of all, emerge from a consideration of what the individual is in his or her fundamental nature. Speech communication education, therefore, is properly considered the process of developing and perfecting the natural powers of the spoken word that are potential in what it means to be human. Since all human beings share the same species-specific capacity for speech communication, all individuals have the same powers (i.e., the three functions) that are the natural and inevitable result of its presence. Thus, speech communication education is to be viewed as the art of stimulating and directing the individual's natural and inevitable powers of the spoken word so that these powers are developed and perfected to their fullest potential. Furthermore, since all people as speech communicators share the same natural powers, the primary aim of speech communication is to be the same for all individuals; that is, the actualization of the powers of the spoken word.[10]

Having set forth this philosophical position, brief attention will be given to some potential concerns that teachers of speech communication should be aware of about the discipline. These concerns are derived from Maritain's work, and there are five of them in all.

Five Concerns for Members of the Discipline

First Concern: Teaching Johnny or Jane, but not "caring" why.

The first concern for teachers of speech communication to guard against is "a lack or disregard of ends."[11] Classroom methods may be liked and

cultivated by teachers of speech communication for their own sake, and not as a means alone. When this happens, these methods cease to lead to the appropriate end, and education in speech communication fails to actualize the unique powers of the spoken word.

This supremacy of method over end can potentially lead to the breakdown of all real purpose and understanding of the goals of speech communication education. This is not to say, however, that the methods typically employed by teachers are inadequate or harmful. On the contrary, research and personal experience tells us that many of these methods are extremely valid and helpful. The problem with too heavy a reliance on method is, according to Maritain, "that they are so good that we lose sight of the end."[12] Hence, the potential weakness of education in speech communication today. Speech communication educators run the risk of becoming so attached to their educational methods that they lose sight of their purpose. In these cases, the methods become so perfected that the "true" aim of education in speech communication is overlooked or disregarded.

Second Concern: Teaching Johnny or Jane, but not "knowing" why.

A second concern for teachers of speech communication to be aware of deals with false or ill-defined ideas concerning the appropriate end of education. If the central aim of speech communication education is to actualize the potential which is inherent in the individual, speech communication scholars are obligated to answer questions about the nature of human existence. The empiricist's approach to this question tends only to think of the individual in terms of measurable or observable data. The essence or being of the individual is never considered, nor are questions related to

the presence or absence of freedom, intentionality, spirituality, etc. These questions are out of the realm of empirical science because they are ontological questions that are not entirely verifiable in sense-experience. Maritain maintains that though the purely scientific idea of humanity can provide us with valuable insights and information concerning the means of education, it cannot guide or determine educational goals and objectives. The purely scientific approach to education ignores these central questions, and explores only the human being in the realm of sense-observation and measurement.

To answer questions about the nature of human existence educators must recognize that individuals, as a result of their capacity for speech communication, are free to think conceptually and with purpose, free to act planfully and in accordance to certain self-imposed goals, free to decide how they will relate to their own life experiences, and free to regulate the behavior of self and others in a way that has no connection with the actual surrounding situation.[13] Hence, the individual speech communicator does not merely exist as a physical being, but has, instead,

> a richer and nobler existence; he has spiritual superexistence through knowledge and life. He is thus, in some way, a whole, not merely a part; he is a universe unto himself, a microcosm in which the great universe in its entirety can be encompassed through knowledge. And through love he can give himself freely to beings who are to him, as it were, other selves; and for this relationship no equivalent can be found in the physical world.[14]

This is not to say that individuals exist independent of their animal origins or separate from the influence of the physical universe. Individuals live by their senses and their instincts as well as by their intelligence and their will. As such, education generally includes a kind of "nonverbal" training, which deals with "psycho-physical habits, conditioned reflexes,

sense-memorization, etc."[15] This kind of training, while not specifically human in nature, plays a part in the individual's total educational process. But, as Maritain notes, the education of the individual is much more than simple animal training. It is, instead, "a human awakening."[16]

What is of crucial importance in speech communication education is an appeal to the individual's capacity to use the spoken word. Such an appeal, proportioned to age and ability, can and should begin with the individual's first educational experiences. As psychologist Jerome Bruner hypothesized, "any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development."[17]

This appeal to the spoken word is thought to guide individuals in the development of the capacities through which they shape themselves as individuals. This is accomplished, most logically and efficiently, through the liberation of the individual's capacity to decenter, or "to see activities and relationships from other than a purely selfish point of view."[18] The end result of decentering is the individual's capacity for choice and autonomy, or the enhancement of the individual's intellect, will, and love and understanding of others.

Third Concern: Teaching Johnny or Jane to be "pragmatic."

A third concern for teachers of speech communication to guard against is an overemphasis of the pragmatic aspects of education. According to Maritain, an inappropriate emphasis on "practicality" leads to a neglect of the proper aim of education, for pragmatics aim at "skill development" and "training" rather than "human development" and "perfection." Such an educational focus ultimately disregards the individual's capacity for conceptual

thought and, as such, debases human nature. As Maritain states:

> It is an unfortunate mistake to define human thought as an organ of response to the actual stimuli and situations of the environment, that is to say, to define it in terms of animal knowledge and reaction, for such a definition exactly covers the way of "thinking" proper only to animals without reason. On the contrary, it is because every human idea, to have a meaning, must attain in some measure..., what things <u>are</u> or consist of unto themselves; it is because human thought is an instrument or rather a vital energy of knowledge or spiritual intuition (I don't mean "knowledge about," I mean "knowledge into"): it is because thinking begins, not only with difficulties but with <u>insights</u>, and ends up in insights which are made true by rational proving or experimental verifying, not by pragmatic sanction, to realize desires which are human because they are rooted in the prime desire for unlimited good, and to dominate, control, and refashion the world. At the beginning of human action, insofar as it is human, there is truth, grasped or believed to be grasped for the sake of truth. Without trust in truth, there is no human effectiveness. Such is, to my mind, the chief criticism to be made of the pragmatic and instrumentalist theory of knowledge.[19]

A "skills" approach to speech communication suggests several serious problems for education. Most importantly, it suggests that by insisting it is more important to emphasize skill development than to "know" speech communication, the teacher will succeed in teaching the student skills, but the student will never succeed in "knowing" his or her discipline. Quite obviously, Maritain was correct when he suggested that what is "wrong" in education begins when the importance of the subject to be taught is forgotten and attention is paid, instead, to "the cult of the means."[20] Such a focus can only lead to a superficial understanding of speech communication as an educational discipline.

Fourth Concern: Teaching Johnny or Jane to be "sociable."

A fourth concern for teachers of speech communication is the belief that the essence of education consists of adapting the individual to "the conditions and interactions of social life."[21] This is not entirely so.

The essence of speech communication education is, instead, to shape the individual. Only when this has been accomplished is it possible to prepare the individual learner to play a productive part in the social group to which he or she belongs.

This is not to say, however, that speech communication should ignore the development of the individual's sense of social obligation and responsibility. Responsible social communication is essential to human education and plays a key role in preparing the individual to lead a useful and cooperative life in the community. But social communication is not the primary purpose of speech communication education, it is the secondary aim. The ultimate end of speech communication education concerns the actualization of the individual's natural powers of speech communication, not the individual's relationship to his or her social environment. In addition, it must not be forgotten that the acquisition of personal autonomy is the prerequisite of responsible social communication. Human beings constitute a self in relationship to others in a larger social group, but the group attains its goals only when it serves the individual person and when it recognizes that the individual has needs which escape the group to which the individual belongs.

Fifth Concern: Teaching Johnny or Jane to be "specialists."

The fifth concern that speech communication educators must guard against is the overemphasis of precision. Precision takes on a variety of forms in the academic community.[22] In speech communication it takes on the characteristics of increased scientific and technical specialization through the use of empirical research methodologies. Though specialization is needed to better understand the dynamics of human communication, its emphasis leads

scholars further and further away from the proper aim of speech communication education by debasing the fundamental nature of humanity. Maritain put it best when he states:

> If we remember that the animal is a specialist, and a perfect one, all of its knowing-power being fixed upon a single task to be done, we ought to conclude that an educational program which would only aim at forming specialists ever more perfect in ever more specialized fields, and unable to pass judgment on any matter that goes beyond their specialized competence, would lead indeed to a progressive animalization of the human mind and life.... The overwhelming cult of specialization dehumanizes man's life.[23]

The trend toward precision in speech communication represents a tremendous problem for the ideals of a liberal education, which originally was intended to move individuals away from any kind of specialized "vocational competence" to a stage of greater generalization. Precision, in and of itself, does not justify an academic discipline or help its students to know what it means to be human. Hence, speech communication must not become the exclusive job of "specialization experts." Contemporary life requires that education strengthen individuals and develop their capacity to generalize, or to freely adapt themselves to new circumstances and experiences. Education in speech communication should liberate and strengthen the human being, for out of the spoken word human intelligence, will, and love arises. Unfortunately, the trend in our discipline toward increased precision may disregard this kind of humanistic development.

Some Concluding Thoughts

This paper began by considering Maritain's statement that the purpose of education is "to make man," or to develop the natural powers that are potential in what it means to be human. Education, therefore, is properly concerned with shaping the individual's natural powers to their fullest

potential, for these powers enable the individual to grow in the life of the mind.

Our major concern as educators is with the development and perfection of the individual's natural powers of speech communication. All individuals have the right to an education that will develop and perfect these powers--that is, they have the right to become fully human. An educational system may deprive students of this right when it (1) disregards the primary aim of education, (2) deals with false or ill-defined ideas concerning this end, (3) overemphasizes pragmatics, (4) deals more with social development than with the acquisition of personal autonomy and/or (5) overemphasizes precision and technical specialization. In other words, speech communication education must not substitute vocationalism for the goals of liberal or general education. Only when the educational system stimulates and directs the individual's natural powers of spoken language so that these powers are developed and perfected to their fullest potential, will the individual be liberated and made aware of his or her own unique potential.

FOOTNOTES

1. Jacques Maritain, Education at the Crossroads (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943), p. 2.

2. Maritain, p. 1.

3. For a comprehensive summary of Maritain's philosophical position see Glenn M. Wingo, The Philosophy of American Education (Ann Arbor, Michigan: D. C. Health, 1965), pp. 307-54.

4. Frank E. X. Dance and Carl E. Larson, Speech Communication: Concepts and Behavior (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972).

5. Eric H. Lenneberg, Biological Foundations of Language (New York: Wiley, 1967).

6. Noam Chomsky, Language and Mind (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972).

7. Robert M. Hutchins, The Conflict in Education (New York: Harper & Row, 1953), p. 68.

8. Mortimer J. Adler, "The Crisis in Contemporary Education," The Social Frontier, V (Feb. 1939), 141-44.

9. Dance and Larson, p. 63.

10. See Frank E. X. Dance, "The Centrality of the Spoken Word," Central States Speech Journal, 23 (Fall 1972), 197-201.

11. Maritain, p. 3.

12. Maritain, p. 3.

13. Dance and Larson, 1972.

14. Maritain, p. 8.

15. Maritain, p. 9.

16. Maritain, p. 9.

17. Jerome S. Bruner, The Process of Education (New York: Vintage Books, 1960).

18. Frank E. X. Dance and Carl E. Larson, The Functions of Human Communication (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976), p. 68.

19. Maritain, pp. 12-13.

20. Maritain, p. 14.

21. Maritain, p. 15.

22. See, for example, Alfred N. Whitehead, The Aims of Education (New York: Free Press, 1929).

23. Maritain, p. 19.